

SMALL CHANGE,



**WOMEN'S
HEALTH
SERVICES
NETWORK**

Working together since 1978

COLLECTIVE IMPACT REPORT
Summary

The role, reach and impact of the women's health sector
in advancing Victorian women's health and equality.



This is a high-level summary of *Small Change, Big Impact: Women's Health Services Network Collective Impact Report*. Detailed case studies, stakeholder testimonials, most significant change stories and other impact data can be found in the full report and its appendices.



About the Report

The *Small Change, Big Impact: Women's Health Services Network Collective Impact Report* (the Report) captures the collective impact over time of the women's health sector in advancing Victorian women's health and equality. It describes the long-term unique and pivotal role of the women's health sector in Victoria's public health infrastructure:

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- the long-term unique and pivotal role of the women's health sector in Victoria's public health infrastructure
- our impact on the state's strategic policy and programmatic landscape
- the return on investment reflected in the 2022–2023 Victorian Government core additional two-year funding uplift.

Through doing so, its purpose is to strengthen the case for continuing to invest in a well-resourced Victorian women's health sector at the end of the funding uplift in June 2024. The report shows that our sector's established infrastructure, decades of experience and best practice ways of working have enabled us to effectively utilise the funding uplift in this first year – resulting in **big impacts from small change**. By demonstrating what the sector has been able to achieve, this report highlights what is possible by continuing to invest in a strong, well-resourced women's health sector.



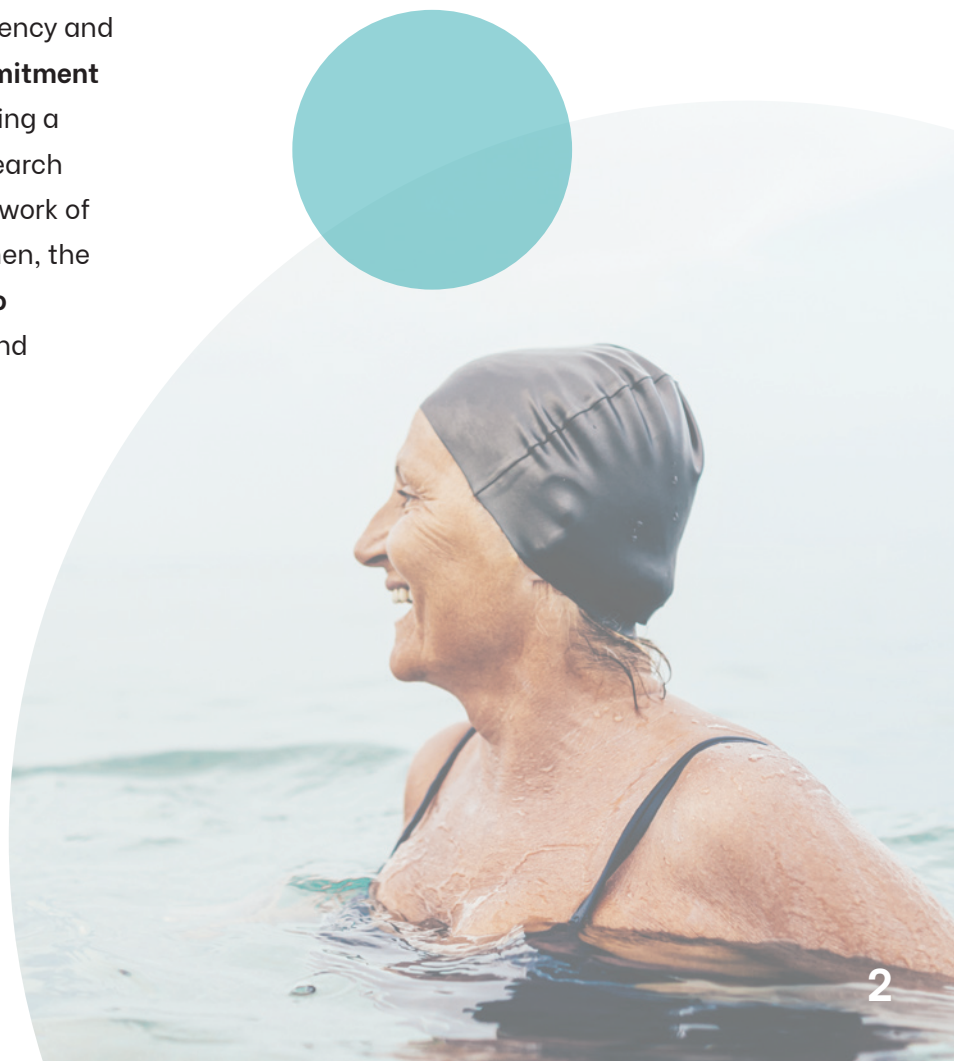
Advancing Victorian women's health and equality across four decades

The women's health sector has been a driving force progressing and shaping Victoria's women's health and equality space since its establishment in the late 1980s. As dedicated preventative health services, the sector was a leading voice in **advocating for the expansion of Victoria's policy and programmatic focus from purely response to one that recognises primary prevention** as crucial to addressing the drivers of women's inequitable health and wellbeing outcomes.

Through its unique role as a network of independent place-based organisations, the sector is able to collaborate to **lead and coordinate best practice health promotion across the state**. This includes a dual role of translating evidence, research and policy into on-the-ground practice, while also informing the state's programmatic and policy design based on community need, promising practice and the emerging evidence base. Efficiency and effectiveness are maximised by a **commitment to evidence-based approaches**, including a long-term commitment to sharing research and practice knowledge across the network of services. By centring the voices of women, the sector is able to **identify and respond to current and emerging priority issues**, and use this knowledge to help shape the government's health agenda.

The sector has a **strong track record and reputation for leadership and impact in Victoria**.

This includes a substantial contribution to **building the evidence base in Australia** through centring the lived experiences of women in research and identifying real-world gaps and potential solutions. This innovation and expertise has been recognised through a large range of **local, Victorian and national awards** over the years, as well as within key state government documents such as the *Royal Commission into family violence findings*; *Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women*; *Safe and strong: A Victorian gender equality strategy*; and the *Victorian women's sexual and reproductive health plan 2022–30*.





Some of the sector's most significant impacts over the last four decades include:

Evidence-building and advocacy to ensure **women's voices and needs are consistently represented on the state's agenda**, including bringing vital gendered analysis to legislation, policy and programs. As a result, today Victoria leads some of the most innovative and progressive reforms to advance women's health and equality in Australia.

Driving state reform to advance women's health and equality such as ongoing advocacy on sexual and reproductive health reform. This long-term evidence-building, education, advocacy and coalition-building has contributed to life-saving advances towards a safe, accessible and empowering Victorian sexual and reproductive health system.

Leading the way in **building evidence and practice knowledge about what works in primary prevention**. This innovation has driven many of the first primary prevention pilot projects in Australia, significantly shaping what is now recognised as best practice and embedded as core work within state government strategies and plans.

Building Victoria's capacity to **undertake inclusive and intersectional practice in the women's health and equality space**. This has contributed to the growing practice and evidence base for what more inclusive, intersectional primary prevention work might look like, and developed more nuanced understandings of the intersections of gender with other forms of privilege and oppression.

Ensuring gender remains in focus, particularly during times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn. The sector has provided **ongoing real-time intersectional analysis that seeks to mitigate the potential for the pandemic response and recovery to exacerbate and worsen women's health and equality outcomes**. This influence is reflected across significant recent and current policy and programmatic decisions.



The women's health sector's collective impact across 2022–2023

Across 2022–2023, the sector has undertaken a breadth and depth of vital work to advance the Victorian Government's vision, using best practice approaches and with meaningful impacts. Work across the government's priority area includes:

Gender equality

- Driving action to deliver on government legislation and policy.
- Championing lived experience and amplifying local voices for better policy and practice.
- Increasing women's health literacy and safety by reaching more women across each region.

Gendered violence prevention

- Driving coordinated primary prevention as regional backbone organisations.
- Delivering best practice collaborative primary prevention action across the state.
- Building capacity of Victoria's prevention and contributor workforce.

Sexual and reproductive health

- Driving delivery of the Victorian Government's *Women's sexual and reproductive health plan*.
- Leading a systems approach to sexual and reproductive health equity through coordinated regional action.
- Tailored capacity-building for Victoria's health sector and communities.

Mental health and wellbeing

- Championing a gender responsive approach to mental health and wellbeing, including through the Women's Mental Health Alliance.
- Strengthening migrant and refugee women's mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

Women in a changing society (climate change, emergency and disaster situations)

- Leading evidence-building on gender, climate and disaster work.
- Supporting recovery from the 2022 Victorian floods.

Additionally, the funding uplift supported **increased research and evaluation capacity** across each women's health service, as well as sector leadership towards a coordinated long-term collective impact approach. It also supported **advancing inclusive and intersectional health promotion practice** through employing more staff with lived experience, collaborating with specialist services, undertaking internal capacity-building, and delivering capacity-building activities to partner organisations.

Positive impacts reported by women's health service partners, stakeholders and communities included statewide and regional coordination and collaboration; strengthening alignment across the public health sector; helping turn ideas into action; increasing Victoria's gender lens; increasing service accessibility and engagement; and empowering the workforce.





Impacts of the funding uplift

The additional funding uplift supported our sector to significantly enhance and extend our reach and impact across the state in 2022–2023, and to further develop the infrastructure needed to drive long-term change.

As of June 2023, the funding uplift has allowed the sector to employ an **additional 67.98 FTE**, consisting of **83 new, extended or expanded positions**. This includes:

- **32 health promotion, policy or community engagement staff**
- **19 bilingual health educators or multicultural health promotion staff**
- **10 training and capacity-building staff**
- **8 research and evaluation staff**
- **5 communications staff**
- **5 managers**
- **4 administration and corporate services staff**

The **workforce boost** was enhanced by the **strengthening of our infrastructure and internal operating systems**, resulting in:

- increased capacity across all health promotion priority areas
- strengthened organisational capacity to deliver
- enhanced research, evidence-building and advocacy
- extended, expanded and new best and promising practice projects
- capacity-building for more workers and enhanced workforces
- enhanced communications to reach more people in more meaningful ways
- strengthened foundations for meaningful long-term evaluation.

As a result of the funding uplift across 2022–2023, the women's health sector was able to undertake significant work to put in place the **people, plans and systems** needed to deliver the ambitious work of achieving women's equality.





The case for a well-resourced Victorian women's health sector

Building on our previous achievements, in 2023–2024 we will continue to:

1. Expand our work across all five priorities areas and extend our reach across our regions.
2. Drive strategic statewide and regional partnerships and alliances to advance women's health and equality.
3. Respond to gendered pandemic health inequalities and maintain an intersectional lens on recovery, as well as building resilience and the knowledge base in preparation for the next crisis.
4. Utilise our established and unique role within Victoria's public health infrastructure to continue enhancing the system, including by supporting the Local Public Health Units and providing expertise on new initiatives such as the rollout of Women's Health Clinics.
5. Advance best practice intersectional health promotion practice across the state, including through our newly established migrant and refugee workforce.
6. Deliver more high-quality training and capacity-building activities across the state for our sector, our regional and statewide partners, and our stakeholders such as Defined Entities, key primary prevention settings and government.
7. Respond to the increasing demand in Victoria for strategic advice, capacity-building and resources by those seeking to embed primary prevention into their everyday practices and policies.
8. Coordinate strategic evidence-building, communications and advocacy at a regional and statewide level to improve Victoria's women's health and equality legislation, policy and programmatic landscape.
9. Coordinate and undertake local, regional and statewide monitoring and evaluation, driven by our increased monitoring and evaluation capacity enabled by the uplift.





By the end of 2023–2024, the uplift will help position the women’s health sector to deliver maximum impact and value on the government’s women’s health and equality ambitions.

This includes:

- the people needed to deliver effectively on government priority areas, extending reach across respective regions, partners and communities to drive and build capacity for best practice health promotion work
- the internal systems and infrastructure required for operating efficiently
- the sector-wide mechanisms and governance practices for coordinated, collaborative and mutually reinforcing statewide reach and impact
- the capacity, processes and frameworks for robust, evidence-based monitoring and evaluation.

However, with the uplift funding guaranteed until 30 June 2024, a return to current core funding only poses a significant threat to all that has been achieved through recent government investment and strategic infrastructure planning. Significantly, the sector stands to lose the 67.98 FTE capacity enabled by the uplift, resulting in job losses to 83 women and the loss of sector expertise and skills. Reduced capacity, reach and impact, combined with a loss in the high-levels of momentum, buy-in and opportunity enabled by recent additional investment, will significantly harm Victoria’s progress towards gender equality. There is the potential not only for stagnation but regression, as evidenced by the rise of backlash and threats to women’s sexual and reproductive health and other rights around the globe; Australia’s precarious Global Gender Gap progress; the negative impacts of the pandemic on gender equality here and overseas; and the persistent high rates of violence against women in Australia.

Continuing to invest in a well-resourced Victorian women’s health sector recognises our unique role and infrastructure in Victoria’s public health system, and best enables our sector to deliver maximum impact and value towards the government’s women’s health and equality reform agenda.





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Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Women's Health Services Network acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters on which we work and live across Victoria. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded and that we are beneficiaries of stolen land and dispossession, which began over 200 years ago and continues today. We are committed to collaboration that furthers self-determination and creates a better future for all.